

The extrapersonal realm: Where resilience runs deep

Why external environmental challenges demand intentional response

Editor's note: This is the fourth and final article in an ongoing series that examines the different elements of resilience and how they can be leveraged by C-suite executives.

In the summer of 2020, endurance artist Tez Steinberg took a sabbatical from his role as a manager in Deloitte's leadership practice to row a 23-foot boat from San Francisco to Hawaii. The solo expedition, known as the [United World Challenge](#), aimed to inspire others, protect the oceans, and raise funds to pay forward a scholarship that changed his life. Ultimately, the grueling quest took 71 days, with Steinberg and his team raising more than \$76,000 in donations.

That journey across the Pacific Ocean was the culmination of a highly personal vision honed from years as an endurance athlete. It's also a powerful example of the *extrapersonal* realm of resilience: the external environmental

conditions we must navigate to bolster resilience and leave a legacy.

In the C-suite, the extrapersonal realm can be the greatest conduit for leaders who want to make an impact. It's the realm where we bounce *beyond*—surpassing current versions of ourselves, self-transcending by breaking through boundaries to reach new potential. It was also a foundational element in Deloitte's recent Executive Resilience Academy, a six-week virtual series, that explored the latest science of resilience and laid out the foundational pieces of ["whole-person" resilience](#).

What those Academy participants discovered—and Steinberg's journey illustrates—is that

steadying ourselves in the face of external triggers that test our resilience requires intentional effort. As the events of the past two years have made abundantly clear, adversities that surround us constantly test our resilience. They compel us to identify our greatest external weaknesses. And in the extrapersonal realm, adversity forces us to change those conditions or figure out ways to diminish their effects.



Environment mastery

External influences shape how we view our own resilience, though we often misjudge our own proficiency. For example, in an [online survey](#) of more than 3,500 Americans, 83% of respondents thought they had high levels of mental and emotional resilience, though only 57% scored as such after an assessment. Mastering those external adversities is at the heart of the “moves” or broad actions we can take to build resilience within the extrapersonal realm.

One of those moves is *environmental agility*, which is our ability to take whatever life throws at us in stride. Achieving this degree of agility requires us to decide how life’s stumbling blocks

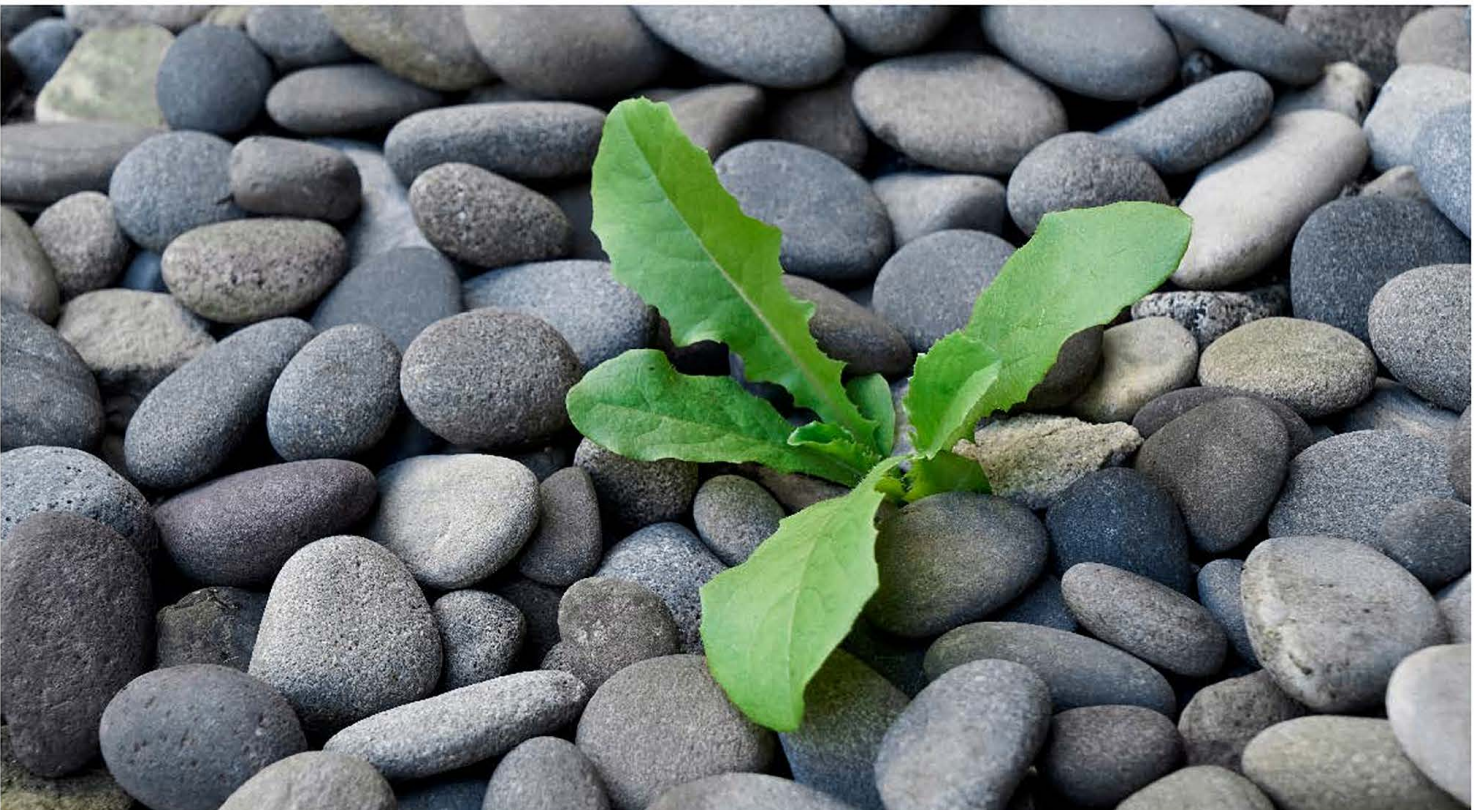
will affect us, the meaning we’ll assign to those obstacles, and the life we’ll have as a result. Strong, connected relationships help us build strength in this area. And C-suite leaders who excel in this regard can build the habit of sensing the health of the workplace—with the objective of helping to mitigate suboptimal circumstances.

The second move within the extrapersonal realm is *impact and service orientation*, in which meaning, or purpose, is focused on someone—or perhaps on many others—rather than on oneself. The business community, for example, increasingly has adopted [purpose as a way to measure the value of a company](#), which represents a real-world example of this move.

“When we talk about service orientation, we’re really looking at deriving meaning from pursuits that positively impact others, versus focusing solely on ourselves,” says Ash Robinson, co-leader of the Executive Resilience Academy. “That’s the kind of daily, lived-in meaning we’re talking about when we talk about meaning and purpose as critical to resilience. Any sense of meaning is critical, but meaning derived from a service orientation is even more resilience-boosting.”

Resilience cascades through teams

Activating the moves of extrapersonal resilience within a team environment can lead to big changes. Consider, for example that just six weeks of daily practice activities for building *meta-*



cognition, mental and emotional agility, and realistic optimism—three moves covered in one of our Academy sessions—increases gray matter in the “sage” (think leadership) centers of the brain.

Within the extrapersonal realm, there are several ways for leaders to apply resilience lessons to teams. One way is by educating team members about the overall makings of resilience (the [eight moves and three realms](#)) and by focusing on setting the foundation for moves such as environmental agility. It’s also important to infuse language about resilience concepts into the team’s regular conversations so people become familiar with the resilience moves.

Enabling teams with distinct resilience practices like those we explore in the Academy—for example, somatic mindfulness practices that build *self-command*—is another powerful way to increase human resilience in an organization.

Finally, leaders can consider role and organization-based ways to support the underlying elements of extrapersonal resilience in the context of team dynamics. That could include aligning individuals with their character and talent strengths by redesigning jobs and team structures, using strengths-based goal setting and performance management standards, and tracking how these

initiatives serve the greater good.

Resilience is at the core of leadership success. For leaders who want to use their organization and role as a force for broader positive change (an essential element of the extrapersonal realm), the kind of impact you want to make ultimately depends on how you align your strengths and talents. Give yourself an empathetic piece of advice to your future self—addressing what you struggle with most now—to infuse your work with a dose of optimism.



More in the Resilience series:

[Building Resilience – A roadmap for the modern C-suite](#)

[Unlocking the core antagonists of resilience: The personal realm](#)

[Relationships and resilience: The interpersonal realm](#)

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